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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 GUATEMALA 000379

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [GT](#)

SUBJECT: GUATEMALA: MILITARY RESERVISTS TO AID POLICE

Classified By: Ambassador James Derham, Reason, 1.4 (d)

1. (SBU) Summary: In response to steadily increasing violent crime and personnel shortages in Guatemala's National Civilian Police (PNC), the GOG announced a plan to deploy 3,000 military reservists and ex-soldiers as auxiliary police agents until the end of 2006. After receiving a month of training, these auxiliary agents will be deployed in regional units under the leadership of detailed active duty Army officers and contracted retired Army officers, and under the command and control of the PNC. Human rights groups have reacted negatively, charging that the proposal violates the Peace Accords and represents a militarization of the police. The GOG is under extreme pressure to address violent crime, and turned to the military in an effort to quickly deploy additional police personnel. End Summary.

2. (SBU) The proposal calls for the recruitment of 3,000 persons who must be between 18 and 30 years of age, have a high school diploma, and have completed military service or graduated from the military high schools located in various regions of the country. These new agents will be divided into six squadrons of 500 personnel and quartered at military bases in the capital and in the departments of Peten, Huehuetenango, Zacapa, Jutiapa, Mazatenango, and Escuintla. The military will have administrative control of these squadrons, i.e. be responsible for housing and feeding the personnel, but the units will be under the operational command and control of the PNC. Troops in these squadrons will not have arrest authority. The military will separately continue to provide personnel (approximately 1,500 soldiers) for deployment in joint patrols with the PNC.

3. (SBU) The squadrons will be led by 72 active duty officers detailed to this duty, as well as 70 retired officers on contract. The unit members are scheduled to receive 30 days of training before being deployed. (President Berger has ordered that the personnel be equipped and deployed by April 7, the Friday before Holy Week.) The military will be in charge of this training but it is to include participation of Police Academy trainers and possibly others. The training will apparently focus on use of force and other legal issues but will also include a human rights component. Additional on-the-job training will be provided after the squadrons are deployed.

4. (U) The initial costs for this proposal are to be split between the Defense Ministry (50 million quetzales, approximately \$6.7 million at current exchange rate), and the Ministry of Government (40 million quetzales or \$5.3 million). The GOG has also said it will seek to identify additional funding.

5. (C) The Army Finance Director and Army Operations Chief separately told Embassy PolMilOff that the Ministry of Government has not cooperated with Defense Ministry efforts to devise plans to share expenses. The Finance Director said that he had tried several times to schedule meetings with his Government Ministry counterparts, without success. The Operations Chief expressed doubts that Ministry of Government would provide much, if any, funding for this effort and reported that he and other senior officers had advised the Defense Minister that the burden for this effort would likely fall solely on the Defense Ministry. The Operations Chief also reported that the additional 3,000 persons would be counted as military personnel, thus increasing the size of the military above its (authorized) strength of 15,500.

6. (SBU) Various human rights groups expressed opposition to the plan, arguing that it represented a violation of the Peace Accords as well as the PNC Organic Law. Activists claimed that the plan contradicted Peace Accord commitments to reduce the size of the military and ensure the civilian character of the police. Critics have argued that such an expenditure would be better invested in the PNC, and a few also voiced concerns that the measure opened the way for a return to human rights abuses committed by military-controlled security forces during the internal conflict. Retired General Julio Balconi, a member of the official Security Advisory Council (CAS), opined that the purpose of the plan was to send a message of security to the population in dangerous areas, and that the people were not concerned about the specific nature (police or military) of the security personnel as long as the personnel provided some measure of safety. Some politicians have also

questioned the plan on budgetary grounds, noting that the recently-approved GOG budget did not include any funding for the proposal.

17. (C) Comment: With the widespread popular perception that public security is continuing to decline under the Berger Administration - a belief only strengthened by a murder rate that climbs every year - the Berger Administration is under great pressure to take visible measures to rein in violent crime. The Defense Minister, despite some apparent misgivings among his own officers, has responded with a novel plan to put more cops on the street. The full details remain to be worked out, and it also remains to be seen if military worries about a lack of cooperation by the Government Ministry will be borne out.

18. (SBU) Comment continued: Regarding compliance with the Peace Accords, the agreements called for a 33 percent reduction in the size of the military; actual reductions have decreased the size of the military by 67 percent. An increase of two or three thousand to the official force strength of the military will still leave it greatly under the Peace Accords limit. The addition of 3,000 military reservists and ex-soldiers to back up a police force of some 18-20,000 personnel should not be characterized as a "militarization" of the police, especially as these personnel will be under the operational command and control of (civilian) police officials and will not have arrest authority.
DERHAM